The only area where financial assistance in the form of a subsidy is provided by the Government to defray the pilgrims' expenses on Haj is that of air fare in respect of pilgrims going for Haj through the Haj Committee. This facility commenced in 1992 and is not extended to pilgrims going for Haj privately. Since 1992, the Haj air charter fare has been fixed at Rs. 12,000, with the Government meeting the balance between this amount and the actual air charter fare per pilgrim negotiated with the air charter company. (The amount of the subsidy is met from the budget of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.)

The total air charter subsidy over the last five years has been as follows:—

| Year | Total Govt, subsidy in crores of Rs. |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 16.77 |
| 1996 | 38.46 |
| 1997 | 80.01 |
| 1998 | 119.44 |
| 1999 | 109.55 |

For the welfare and assistance of the approximately one lakh Indian Haj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia, during the Haj season, the Government augments the permanent staff in the Consulate General in Jeddah by deputing upto 400 officials, including a 225-member medical mission. The Consulate General also recruits about 500 seasonal staff members locally and sets up control rooms at the Haj terminal in Jeddah, as also at the main Haj offices in Makkah and Madinah and the ten branch offices and medical centres in Makkah. The Consulate General supervises the movement of pilgrims from one point to the other during the Haj season, though day-to-day responsibility is vested in the local Government and its agents. The Consulate General also assists pilgrims at the Haj air terminal in Jeddah and ensures the welfare and smooth movement of incoming and outgoing pilgrims.

**Linking of foreign missions via wireless network**

339. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to link New Delhi with foreign missions via a wireless network;

(b) if so, the details and present status thereof;

(c) whether Public Accounts Committee has made any objection on this decision; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. A High Frequency Radio Communication (HFRC) network has been

established to link the Ministry of External Affairs with 22 Indian missions abroad, out of 27 Missions initially identified for the project. This is intended for emergency use when the normal channels of communications are disrupted. Since the performance has been much below expected levels, it is now not proposed to cover any additional missions with this wireless system.

In order to overcome equipment related problems and certain software deficiencies, the entire network requires extensive repairs and rehabilitation, which are currently underway.

(c) and (d) Yes Sir. The Public Accounts Committee has made critical observations about the handling of the project. Its detailed findings are available in the Sixth Report of the Public Accounts Committee for the year 1998-99 of the Twelfth Lok Sabha entitled "Infructuous Expenditure of Rs. 29 crores-Communication Network." These observations have been taken into account and, as mentioned earlier, appropriate remedial measures are currently underway.

**Cadre review of IFS (B)**

340. MISS MABEL REBELLO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether despite acute stagnation, no cadre review of IFS (B) has been carried out in spite of proposals being pending since 1986; if so, the reasons therefore and steps being taken to alleviate sufferings of IFS (B);

(b) whether it is a fact that promotion of IFS have improved because of 4 cadre reviews, some of which resulted in reduction in some posts of IFS (B) and because of in situation upgradation of posts at Grade I, II, III and IV level; if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what measures have been taken and planned to improve promotional avenues of IFS (B)?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (c) IFS (B) is a heterogeneous cadre comprising ten grades. In view of the inherent complexities involved in promotion from one grade to the other as well as prevalent stagnation in each of these grades, it has not been possible to process a single cadre review proposal. However, the steps taken in recent years to address the issues of stagnation in various grade of IFS(B) include proposals for in-situ promotion of Section Officers to Under Secretaries and Private Secretaries to Principal Private Secretaries, Assistants to Section Officers, Personal Assistants to Private Secretaries, upgradation of 39 posts of Private Secretaries to Principal Private Secretaries and upgradation of 37% of posts of Principal Private Secretaries to Senior Principal Private Secretaries.

(d) Cadre review of the IFS has been carried out from time to time as per normal practice. These have not resulted in reduction of posts in the IFS (B).